

UNIT 5 – “FIGURE IT OUT” – 6th GRADE LANGUAGE ARTS - LESSON PLAN

“Becoming History Detectives Using *Shakespeare’s Secret*”

OVERVIEW

Students use *Shakespeare's Secret*, a featured title on the [Teachers' Choices Booklist](#) (International Reading Association, 2006), as a springboard to exploration of the controversy regarding the authorship Shakespeare's works. The novel makes liberal use of the historical details surrounding William Shakespeare's life, and exposes students to the possibility raised by some theorists that Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, was the true author of the works that have long been attributed to the Bard. Students explore the historical references in the novel and generate questions for further research. As they research these questions on suggested websites, they organize their findings with the help of the [ReadWriteThink Notetaker](#). Then they work in small groups to create and present short dramatic skits that creatively connect the novel with the historical facts.

OBJECTIVES

Common Core/Essential Standards

RL.6.5: Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

RI.6.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.

W.6.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

SL.6.4: Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

L.6.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

NCSCOS Standards - old curriculum

Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGY

- *Shakespeare's Secret* by Elise Broach (Henry Holt, 2005)
- Computers with Internet access and printing capability
- Chart paper and marker
- Stopwatch

STUDENT INTERACTIVES

Grades **3 – 12** | Student Interactive | Organizing & Summarizing

[ReadWriteThink Notetaker](#)

Useful for a wide variety of reading and writing activities, this outlining tool allows students to organize up to five levels of information.

PRINTOUTS

[History Detective: Skit Assessment](#)

[History Detective Notetaker: Checklist and Reflections](#)

WEBSITES

[Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet](#)

[Folger Shakespeare Library](#)

[Project Gutenberg](#)

[Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford](#)

[Shakespeare Oxford Society](#)

PREPARATION

1. Students should read the book *Shakespeare's Secret* by Elise Broach prior to starting this lesson. They can read the novel as part of a class literature unit (e.g., a mystery/adventure genre study), in literature circles, or independently.
2. Bookmark the [ReadWriteThink Notetaker](#) tool on your classroom or school computers. Check to make sure that computers have the most recent version of the Flash plug-in. (This plug-in can be downloaded for free from the ReadWriteThink.org [Site Tools](#) page.) If you are using computers in

your school's computer lab, be sure to reserve sufficient blocks of time for your needs.

3. Familiarize yourself with the ReadWriteThink Notetaker tool. A prerequisite for students' use of this tool is prior experience using research to develop an outline. You will want to adapt the outlining activity to match your students' needs and abilities, providing additional instruction as necessary. Create and print a sample page for reference when discussing and modeling the tool in Session 1.
4. Bookmark the websites listed in the Websites section on the computers students will be using. Be sure to familiarize yourself with each site (and any other related sites you choose) so you can guide students to effectively use them for their research in Session 2.
5. Print and make copies of the [History Detective Notetaker: Checklist and Reflections](#) and the [History Detective: Skit Assessment](#) to distribute to students.

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

Students will

- Access prior knowledge by summarizing the novel
- Use skimming techniques to identify historical details featured in the novel
- Use brainstorming to identify inquiry questions
- Conduct research into a specified topic by using a variety of online resources
- Extend and synthesize what they have learned by working in cooperative groups to plan, write, and perform a short dramatic skit

Session 1

1. Introduce the lesson by saying, "We're going to start working on a new project that draws from the historical details found in *Shakespeare's Secret*. You will become history detectives." Invite a few volunteers to briefly summarize the novel as a quick refresher for everyone. Plot points will vary and will likely include references to Hero's experiences at school, interactions with her family, time spent with Danny and Mrs. Roth, and so on. Accept all correct observations, making sure that the following points are mentioned:
 - Sixth-grader Hero Netherfield (named after a character in *Much Ado About Nothing*) chases down clues to the mystery surrounding a diamond that was rumored to be hidden in her family's home.
 - Hero eventually finds that the diamond belonged to real-life Elizabethan figure Edward de Vere—a man some scholars believe to be the true author of the works attributed to the Bard.
2. Explain to students that they will be using the book as a springboard for further inquiry into an issue that scholars are debating in real life. Ask students to brainstorm what that issue might be, leading them to the question of who really wrote William Shakespeare's works. Tell students that at the end

of the unit they will also develop and perform short dramatic skits related to their research.

3. Give students a few minutes to scan the book, particularly Chapter 5, for the historical details the author includes. Discuss students' findings and recollections, listing them on chart paper as you go. Help students focus the discussion on the points they think might be the most useful to them.

Sample Points from *Shakespeare's Secret*

Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, is thought by some to have written Shakespeare's works.

There is no proof that de Vere is the real author, just "intriguing clues."

Reasons people might think Shakespeare did not write his own plays:

- a. Shakespeare was not well educated or well traveled, but his works depend on a vast knowledge of literature, history, law, geography, and royal life.
- b. There were no obituaries or public memorials after Shakespeare's death even though his works were popular.
- c. He left behind no book collection, written manuscripts, or documents in his own hand that link him in any way to literature.
- d. The only six signatures found were primitive and contained different spellings of Shakespeare's name.

Reasons people might think Edward de Vere wrote the works:

- a. He was a poet and a playwright.
 - b. He had the right background, and many events in his life are reflected in Shakespeare's plays.
 - c. His personal Bible had margin notes that correspond with verses in Shakespeare's works.
 - d. He left behind many literary documents.
4. Demonstrate the [ReadWriteThink Notetaker](#) tool by working through the online tutorial, which follows after the opening screen. The tutorial also provides natural opportunities to briefly review notetaking techniques with your students. As you conduct the tutorial, insert sample topics relevant to the assignment students will be working on. Topics can vary, but examples may include:

I. Why the authorship issue was raised

II. Information that supports Shakespeare as the author

III. Information that supports de Vere as the author

IV. My thoughts about the authorship issue

5. Tell students that they will use the Notetaker tool to take notes while conducting their research online. You may wish to allow each individual to choose his or her organizational format (bullets, Roman numerals, or letters), or you can assign a single format to your class.

Homework: Students should make individual lists of the main topics they want to research in their quest to learn more about whether Shakespeare wrote the works attributed to him.

Session 2

1. Begin this session by asking students to share research ideas from their homework assignment. Focus on what students feel are the most important topics to research. These topics may include:

Details about Shakespeare's life

Details about de Vere's life

How Shakespeare came to be credited with the works in the first place

When and why questions about authorship came up

The most current thinking on this issue

2. Extend students' inquiry by asking them whether other questions come to mind, particularly regarding the importance of this issue. For example, "How important is it to know for sure who wrote the works?" or "What kinds of things might happen if we found out Shakespeare did not write what we thought he did?" Prompt students for other questions they may have, accepting all reasonable responses and encouraging students to jot them down. Questions may include:

What would happen to all the history books in existence now?

How might the final answer affect Shakespeare scholars?

Is it even possible to know the truth when hundreds of years have passed?

What if neither Shakespeare nor de Vere can be verified as the author?

What if both Shakespeare and de Vere wrote some of the works? Could they have worked together?

Could several authors have written Shakespeare's works?

Why does any of this matter to me?

3. Give students the rest of the session to work as history detectives, conducting their research using the recommended websites and any others you have selected (see Preparation, Step 4). Be sure to provide some guidance about efficiently accessing the most relevant information on the sites. Remind them to keep careful notes using the [ReadWriteThink Notetaker](#) tool. They should also transfer any relevant notes they have already made to the Notetaker tool. Check on students' progress as they are working, making sure you are available to answer questions about the task or the Notetaker tool.
4. In closing, tell students that in the next session they will work in groups to write short dramatic skits related to the Shakespeare-de Vere question.

Homework: Any students who have not completed their online research should do so before Session 3. Each student should also complete the [History Detective Notetaker: Checklist and Reflections](#) sheet.

Session 3

1. Ask students about their experiences as history detectives. First, find out whether students have any questions about what they found during their online research or about using the [ReadWriteThink Notetaker](#). Then, ask whether they were able to gather lots of interesting and varied information about Shakespeare and de Vere.
2. Tell students that in this session they will work together to write skits. Spend a few minutes going over a simple format they can use for writing the script. Write examples of the format on chart paper, adding to each element as you go.

Character name. When a character is speaking or acting, put his or her name or description at the beginning of the line with a colon.

Example

Little Girl:

Dialogue. Use quotation marks when writing dialogue and begin a new line each time a new character speaks.

Example

Little Girl: "May I have some ice cream?"

Mother: "Say 'please,' and I'll think about it."

Action. Indicate any action in parentheses.

Example

Little Girl: "May I have some ice cream?" (She tugs on her mother's arm)

Mother: (Reaching down to ruffle her daughter's hair) "Say 'please,' and I'll think about it."

3. Assign students to groups of four to five, and explain the scriptwriting task. Each group will plan, write, and perform a short creative skit about the authorship question discussed in *Shakespeare's Secret* using the novel and the research they conducted in Session 2. Each skit should last no longer than five minutes. Characters in the skit should be characters from the novel. Make sure students understand that anyone mentioned in the book, real or fictional, is fair game. Have students brainstorm characters they might feature in their skits including:

Hero	Beatrice
Mrs. Roth	Danny
Hero and Beatrice's mom or dad	William Shakespeare
Queen Elizabeth I	Edward de Vere
Anne Boleyn	Henry VIII
Aaron	Either of the Murphys
Hero the dog	Tory
Mrs. Rivnor	Ben
Mr. Cordova	

4. Emphasize to students that the skit can be about anything they want-as long as the characters are in some way talking about or addressing the Shakespeare authorship question. Encourage them to be creative and incorporate what they have learned from their research. Ask volunteers to share a few possible concepts for the skit, such as:

Hero and a group of students discussing the issue

Hero's dad presenting the topic to Hero's school

Beatrice and Danny teaming up to investigate

Hero and Danny traveling back in time to speak to Shakespeare

Shakespeare and de Vere making a secret deal about the works

5. Make sure that each group divides up the work among its members. Although students will discuss and plan the skit as a group, individual tasks may include writing or typing the script, incorporating research information into the dialogue, performing, directing, and gathering any simple props.

6. Give students the remainder of the session to work on their skits. Stop by each group's workspace to observe and offer guidance.

Homework: Encourage groups to get together outside class, as needed, to work on finalizing their scripts before Session 4.

Session 4

1. This entire session should be dedicated to allowing groups to polish their scripts and rehearse the final versions several times from start to finish. (It is not necessary for students to memorize their parts, but they should be comfortable with the content.)
2. Check in with each group to see how they are doing and watch at least one run-through of their performance. Offer encouragement and suggestions for improvement as necessary. Remind students of the five-minute time limit for the skit and encourage them to track their performance time during rehearsal.

Session 5

1. Have each group present their skit to the class, allowing for a brief round of audience appreciation and commentary after each performance. Have a volunteer time each skit with a stopwatch to keep everyone on schedule.
2. Distribute the [History Detective: Skit Assessment](#) sheets and have students assess their performance on the project using the scoring key at the bottom.
3. Conclude the lesson with a class discussion about the lesson experience, posing some or all of the following questions:

What did you learn from being history detectives using *Shakespeare's Secret*?

What was the most enjoyable thing about being history detectives?

What was the most surprising thing?

What conclusions, if any, have you reached about the Shakespeare authorship issue?

What contemporary news events-or events from your own life-remind you of the historical details used in the novel?

Now that you have read *Shakespeare's Secret* and investigated some of the facts from the story, what do you think about historical details being used in fiction? Does it enhance the story? Could it create confusion about what has happened in real life?

EXTENSIONS

Challenge interested students to read *Much Ado About Nothing*. They can read it online using a public domain literature database such as [Project Gutenberg](#). Encourage them to write and perform a skit that ties events or characters in the play to the Shakespeare-de Vere question they have been studying. Alternately, they can create a skit that compares the Beatrice and Hero characters in both the play and the novel *Shakespeare's Secret*.

Invite students to do additional research on the historical details found in *Shakespeare's Secret*. For example, instead of focusing on the authorship question, they can explore de Vere's relationships with Elizabeth I and Anne Boleyn. Have them use the [ReadWriteThink Notetaker](#) tool to organize their findings. Then encourage them to present what they have learned to the class in an interesting way.

Once students have studied some of the details of Shakespeare's life, challenge them to complete a crossword puzzle. Visit the online [Crossword Puzzle](#) tool and select Play One of Ours and the 9-12 tab. In the drop-down menu you will find a puzzle titled *An Introduction to William Shakespeare*. Students can solve the puzzle online or you can print it off and give them blank copies. For more information about the puzzle, see [Playing Puzzles: A Guide for Teachers](#).

STUDENT ASSESSMENT/REFLECTIONS

Observe students during class discussions and while working on their online research and skits to ensure that they understand the assignments and are keeping pace with the individual tasks. Provide any additional guidance as needed.

Review the completed [History Detective Notetaker: Checklist and Reflections](#) sheets to ensure that students made effective use of the [ReadWriteThink Notetaker](#) tool.

Review the completed [History Detective: Skit Assessment](#) sheets and add your own scoring of each student's performance to provide feedback on the quality of his or her work on the skit project.

Conduct the final class discussion in Session 5 to synthesize what students have learned, draw connections to current events or their own lives, and reflect on their final conclusions.

RESOURCES

Kornfield, J., & Leyden, G. (2005). [Acting out: Literature, drama, and connecting with history](#). *The Reading Teacher*, 59(3), 230–238.

Dramatic engagement can greatly enhance students' understanding of the stories they read, adding depth and dimension to the plot, setting, and characters that simply reading the printed words rarely accomplishes.

Drama can be the perfect vehicle for integrating reading with other areas of the curriculum. In particular, acting out historical stories in the classroom can bring history to life in powerful and exciting ways.

LESSON PLANS

Grades **6 – 8** | Lesson Plan | Standard Lesson

[Analyzing Advice as an Introduction to Shakespeare](#)

Popular culture provides an introduction to Shakespeare's poetic devices in this lesson, which asks students to explore an excerpt from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Grades **6 – 8** | Lesson Plan | Recurring Lesson

[Choosing, Chatting, and Collecting: Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy](#)

Students identify interesting words from Shakespeare's plays and add them to a classroom vocabulary collection.

STUDENT INTERACTIVES

Grades **3 – 12** | Student Interactive | Organizing & Summarizing

[ReadWriteThink Notetaker](#)

Useful for a wide variety of reading and writing activities, this outlining tool allows students to organize up to five levels of information.

Grades **3 – 12** | Student Interactive | Organizing & Summarizing

[Cube Creator](#)

The interactive Cube Creator helps students identify and summarize key elements. It can be used as a prewriting or postreading activity.